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Security Council

Seventy-second year

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8027th meeting
Friday, 18 August 2017, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Aboulatta	(Egypt)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Sadykov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Ms. Schoulgin-Nyoni
	Ukraine	Mr. Fesko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Tribute to the victims of the terrorist attack in Barcelona, Spain

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the members of the Security Council, I should like to condemn in the strongest terms the unconscionable terrorist attack in Barcelona, Spain, which targeted innocent civilians. The members of the Security Council express their deepest condolences to the families of those killed and their sympathy to the people and the Government of Spain. I ask Council members now to rise in a minute of silence for the victims.

The members of the Council observed a minute of silence.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Yemen to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Abdulmalik Al-Mikhlafi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs for the Republic of Yemen.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; and Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen.

Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed is joining the meeting via video-teleconference from Amman.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: This is my tenth statement on Yemen to the Chamber since I took up my post in June 2015, only a few months after the crisis in Yemen had escalated. I have visited the country three times during my tenure — Aden twice, Ibb, Sana'a, by mountainous road to to Hudaydah city and port, Amran, and in an attempt to get to Taiz, which was aborted after being caught up in gunfire. Wherever and whatever side of this horrific fight, and above all for those of neither side caught up in this maelstrom of fear, death and destruction, I have been deeply moved by the terrible human suffering everywhere in Yemen.

It grieves me that in these past two years, and despite my and my team's best efforts, I have been unable to report any significant improvement in the deplorable, avoidable and completely man-made catastrophe that is ravaging the country. On the contrary, the Yemeni people's suffering has relentlessly intensified. Today, millions of people in Yemen are facing a triple tragedy: the spectre of famine, the world's largest ever single-year cholera outbreak, and the daily deprivation and injustice of a brutal conflict that the world is allowing to drag on and on — all totally preventable, avoidable and treatable. This human tragedy is deliberate and wanton; it is political tragedy, but with will and with courage, which are both in short supply, it is stoppable.

The impact of this conflict on the basic needs and dignity of ordinary Yemenis every day is clear. We have been over the harrowing figures time and again in the Chamber. Seventeen million Yemenis do not know if or where they will get their next meal; nearly 7 million are facing the threat of famine; and nearly 16 million lack access to water or sanitation. With numbers of this scale, there is a pernicious risk that we may become mired in a statistical fog or that we may begin to take an overly technical view of this crisis, almost as if it were a natural phenomenon. It is not.

We must remember that these figures represent human faces and enormous suffering — parents unable to feed their families, children succumbing to malnutrition or disease, and countless other tragedies. They represent the heart-breaking story of a six-year-old girl — and her only dignity left is that I have been asked not to give her name — whose family spent six months sleeping in a hole in the ground at night in order to avoid air strikes near their home. This little girl was already suffering from malnutrition, and her condition became severe while hiding with her family. After several rounds of treatment she was recovering, only to contract and die of acute watery diarrhoea shortly after her release from hospital.

For the sake of that innocent child and countless others, the appalling statistics of this crisis must not obscure the central fact that Yemen's catastrophe

is completely man-made. It is a direct result of the deliberate policies, tactics and actions of the parties and their powerful proxies to the conflict, and it is completely preventable.

Before the escalation of conflict, Yemen was making progress against its long-standing challenges, not least the kleptocracy under which it was ruled and its people exploited for so long. In 2014, fewer people were going hungry than three years earlier. Nutrition was improving with fewer children stunted or underweight. School enrolment was rising. All of that has now been sharply reversed, and with that reversal has come the near total collapse of public institutions that would otherwise help Yemenis to cope. Today, only 45 per cent of health facilities are fully functioning. Sanitation systems have mostly ground to a halt. Approximately 1.2 million public employees, including 30,000 health workers and 193,000 teachers, have been paid erratically or not at all since October 2016, thereby accelerating the decline in essential services and depriving nearly a quarter of the population — civil servants and their families — of a reliable income. We see the consequences of that collapse in people's rising needs across all sectors, and perhaps most dramatically in the current cholera outbreak, which has spread rapidly across Yemen in the wake of degraded sanitation systems and shattered health facilities.

The conduct of the war continues to be really vicious and brutal, with frequent complete disregard for international humanitarian law, principles or just the basic norms of human behaviour. Even wars have rules, and even wars have their limits, or at least they should have. Earlier this month, reported air strikes in Sa'dah killed 12 civilians and injured 10 others. The death toll included six children killed in their family home. Investigations continue, although we know already that only the Saudi-led coalition has the means to carry out aerial attacks. In Taiz indiscriminate shelling into populated areas continues as a grotesque feature of the conflict, mostly by forces affiliated with the Houthis or former President Saleh. Over the past two years, those incidents have reportedly killed or injured dozens of civilians, including children, and damaged civilian infrastructure.

In the absence of accountability mechanisms or a concerted push by Member States for a political settlement, the violence is intensifying. During 2017, the number of air strikes per month has been three times higher than it was the previous year, and monthly reports of armed clashes have increased by more than 50 per cent. All that has been said and the outrage that has been expressed here around the Security Council table have only produced a dramatically worse situation perpetrated by the stubborn, brutal parties and their proxies to this cynical and inhuman man-made catastrophe.

Parties to the conflict and their proxies also continue to restrict the flow of essential commercial and humanitarian supplies and staff. Yemen imports more than 90 per cent of its staple food and nearly all medicine and fuel, which is urgently needed to pump clean drinking water and run hospital generators. The United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) was established in May 2016 to facilitate critical commercial imports, yet the Government of Yemen and the coalition at times bypass UNVIM by unilaterally denying or excessively delaying entry to vessels carrying essential cargo. Member States must determinedly do more to champion that mechanism. It is simply wrong to insist that those cargos go to Aden and not to Hudaydah.

The cruel and baseless closure of Sana'a airport to civilian traffic by the Saudi-led coalition is another restriction blocking thousands of Yemenis from travelling abroad for medical care. Commercial flights served Sana'a in the first year of the conflict, and I do not see why they should not immediately resume, at the very least, for humanitarian cases. It was said recently that the Yemen Government could see no raison why Sana'a airport should open as there were flights to Aden and road access to Sana'a.

I flew on the first United Nations Humanitarian Air Service flight to Aden. I have been talking to the truck drivers on that route. That is not a real solution with regard to the quantities and urgency even approaching the scale of the human emergency that we are trying to overcome despite such nasty, cynical machinations supported by parties to the conflict and their proxies where there is complete lock-down control of the airspace. Let us be clear that it is a fact that most of the need is in the northern and not the southern part of Yemen. It is a fact that Sana'a and Hudaydah and not Aden best serve the north.

I therefore also call on all parties to the conflict and their proxies to ensure that humanitarian staff can quickly enter Yemen and to avoid any bureaucratic or administrative requirements that may unduly hinder

the rapid delivery of assistance or delay the deployment of aid workers. Once in Yemen, critical commercial or humanitarian supplies and staff must be able to move to their destination nearest to the human needs of the most vulnerable without interference. Too often, the de facto authorities in Sana'a or local officials in areas under their control block, delay or otherwise interfere with humanitarian action. Those restrictions are especially prevalent in front-line areas, thereby preventing or delaying partners from reaching the most vulnerable. Local officials in areas controlled by Sana'a de facto authorities, at times, also seek to influence the selection of beneficiaries. We have also seen repeated incidents of aid diversion in areas under the control of Sana'a de facto authorities, especially in Taiz governorate.

At a time when Yemen is facing the real near threat of famine, local authorities in areas controlled by Sana'a de facto authorities have also hindered humanitarian assessment missions that are needed so as to establish the necessary evidence base for humanitarian assistance. Despite my repeated calls to the de facto authorities in Sana'a to facilitate imports of armoured vehicles and other equipment critical to humanitarian action, progress remains painfully slow. Many of those incidents are eventually resolved through discussions with the de facto authorities, but the time lost represents an unacceptable burden for people who desperately need help, and directly causes avoidable death.

Humanitarian partners continue to reach the most vulnerable people through a well-led, principled and coordinated response despite extraordinary challenges. More than 120 partners have assisted 5.9 million people this year in every governorate of Yemen through United Nations-coordinated humanitarian action. The cholera response has established 222 treatment centres and 926 oral rehydration points across the country. Despite those achievements, partners are struggling with funding shortages. The Yemen humanitarian response plan has received only 39 per cent of its revised requirements of $2.3 billion for 2017 although we are already two thirds of the way through the year. I stress that we now urgently need Member States and other partners to provide full funding to the humanitarian response plan. There is no time to lose, and even if all the fighting and the restrictions were stopped within the next hour, we would continue to need that amount. Let us be clear that the sum of $2.3 billion is not an inflated negotiating number. It is a careful and collective best estimate of the cost of meeting the needs of Yemenis that the parties and their proxies either do not want or do not care for them to get.

Humanitarian action alone cannot and should not replace the commercial or public sectors in Yemen, nor can it resolve the underlying crisis. An end to the violence, a cessation in hostilities and a sustainable political agreement are the building blocks of Yemen's peaceful future. But while those are being sought, humanitarians must be able to carry out their work and provide aid and support to the millions of Yemeni people in desperate need. The international community must take meaningful action. I renew my call for the Council's support not only with additional funding, but to address the following points.

First, we must ensure that all ports — land, sea and air — are open to civilian — including commercial — traffic. This includes supporting UNVIM, lifting restrictions on commercial imports, immediately re-opening Sana'a airport and allowing delivery of desperately needed mobile cranes to Hudaydah port, which handles some 70 per cent of imports into Yemen and is the closest port of entry to the majority of people who need humanitarian assistance. The Council must not be swayed or deterred by those saying Aden — or other ports — is good enough.

Secondly, we must influence parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian and human rights law. This entails all Member States using all possible means of leverage and influence to ensure that the parties and their proxies protect civilians and infrastructure, respecting the fundamental rules of distinction, proportionality and precaution. It also includes facilitating entry of life-saving supplies into Yemen and their rapid distribution without interference. I would like to be clear: of course, the evidence is being gathered to hold hideous breaches of international humanitarian law to account one day.

Thirdly, civil servant salaries must be paid. Recent funding in support of essential services is a temporary measure that will shore up some services in priority locations. But only full payment of civil servant salaries across the country — a basic obligation of the State — will halt institutional collapse. This collapse is in no one's interest and it exacerbates all the death, disease and human damage.

Fourthly, accountability must be strengthened. More broadly, there must be accountability for the appalling conduct of this entire war. We must not get hung up on

the semantics of who is a party, who is a proxy and who denies being involved. All the perpetrators and their facilitators of this hideous Yemen war know who they are. The evidence of their conduct is being gathered, preserved and prepared for holding each and all to account, to seek to avert the abominable confidence that the sense of impunity is currently motivating them to perpetrate this horror on the Yemeni people. We therefore welcome all steps towards improving this accountability. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has rightly called for the creation of an international independent body to investigate alleged violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. I urge the Human Rights Council to act on this call.

Fifthly, we must demand an immediate cessation of hostilities, a return to negotiations and a political settlement. Parties to the conflict have brought ruin and deprivation to millions of Yemenis for more than two years. There is no military solution to this conflict, and the international community must push for a political settlement based on peaceful negotiations, and, indeed, compromises. Not to admit that fact is to deliberately condemn many more Yemeni people — girls, boys, women and men — to death, damage, fear and hopelessness in this deliberate, man-made human catastrophe.

On this day, of all days, World Humanitarian Day, I straight-forwardly ask members of the Security Council: how much shame can we all, members of the Council in particular, keep accepting on our failure to rein in the parties and proxies to this heinous war and to start meeting the needs and the legitimate hopes that every Yemeni person should be allowed to have and that we would demand as the very minimum for each and every one of us?

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed.

Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed (*spoke in Arabic*): Yemen today continues to traverse a critical and agonizing period, as civilians pay a terrible price in an unending power struggle. Those who survive the fighting face death by famine or disease, as the economic situation continues to deteriorate and the humanitarian conditions worsens.

Military clashes have continued in several governorates around the country. On 4 August, according to several field reports, an air strike in the Madha area of Sa'dah governorate resulted in the death of eight civilians. On 20 August, another air strike on the Mawza district of Taiz killed more than 20 civilians. Houthi forces and forces loyal to Ali Abdullah Saleh continued to shell residential areas in Taiz, inflicting heavy losses among civilians who have already been subjected to much hardship over the past two years. In addition, several ballistic missiles have been launched into Saudi Arabia.

There were also reports of attacks on ships in Mokha port. Those attacks are a further evidence of the increasing threat to maritime security in the Red Sea. This threat puts the much-needed humanitarian and commercial supplies in peril.

We have also observed continued hostilities along the Yemeni-Saudi borders as well as in Hajjah, Midi and Ma'rib. Fighting escalated in western Taiz, around the Khalid Bin Al Walid camp and the Taiz-Al Hudaydah road. Moreover, forces of the Government of Yemen, backed by the United Arab Emirates and United States Special Forces, have launched a military offensive in Shabwa targeting Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula fighters. I reiterate that the longer the conflict goes on, the higher the risk that terrorist groups will spread and the stronger their influence will become.

Uncontrolled migration to Yemen through the Gulf of Aden has continued relentlessly with tragic consequences. On 9 and 10 August, the International Organization for Migration reported that more than 41 migrants died after they had been forced by traffickers to abandon the boats and jump into the sea off the coast of Shabwa.

In brief, death looms for Yemenis by air, land and sea. Diseases and epidemics are at unprecedented levels, as the Council has just heard from the Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, my colleague, Mr. Stephen O'Brien. I would like to commend Stephen for the role he has played. Since this is his last meeting with the Security Council on Yemen, I would also like to commend him for his courage and continued support for and visits to the most dangerous country in the world.

Those who have survived cholera will continue to suffer the consequences of what I call the "political cholera" that infects Yemen and continues to obstruct

the road towards peace. Over the last few weeks, I have visited Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Sultanate of Oman, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. In these visits, I met with several Ministers for Foreign Affairs as well as other senior officials from Yemen and the region. There is still consensus on the need to reach a political solution for the Yemeni crisis and to support the United Nations-sponsored peace process under the auspices of the Secretary-General. The international community is unified in support of a peaceful settlement, but the parties to the conflict continue to miss this opportunity. Certain parties continue to take advantage of internal divisions and place personal interests ahead of the urgent need for peace in Yemen.

The political tensions in Yemen continue to undermine the State institutions on which many Yemenis depend. Immediate measures are needed to stop the deterioration of the humanitarian situation and save the country from further violence, epidemics, famine and other preventable and controllable crises. We are currently urging the parties to agree to measures that will preserve the country's vital institutions and help, in the first phase, to secure the continued flow of humanitarian aid, pay salaries to civil servants and bring the smuggling of weapons under control.

The proposal seeks to ensure the safe and uninterrupted functioning of the port of Hudaydah, which is presently a key artery for the entire Yemeni economy. It includes a practical plan to hand over the port to a committee of respected Yemenis with security and the economic expertise, who would be working under United Nations guidance and oversight. The committee would work to prevent the smuggling of weapons and ensure the safety and security of the port's operations and infrastructure. The committee would also ensure the smooth flow of humanitarian and commercial goods through the port to all parts of Yemen, as well as the transfer of port revenues to support the resumption of salary payments to civil servants.

In parallel, we are working with the parties on reopening Sana'a International Airport to commercial flights. That is a vital and fundamental component of the proposals, as it would make it possible for the wounded and sick to seek treatment abroad and permit students to continue their studies outside of Yemen. It would also ease imports and exports and improve the conditions of Yemeni citizens. There should also be immediate steps to reopen roads to and from Taiz for humanitarian and commercial supplies, as many representatives of Taiz civil society have demanded. The denial of access to basic goods for the people of Taiz has gone on too long. Ensuring freedom of movement for civilians is required by international humanitarian law, but is also called for out of respect for the long-standing values of solidarity and compassion of Yemeni society.

Those initiatives should contribute to the rebuilding of confidence between the parties and serve as a first step towards a new national cessation of hostilities and the resumption of discussions for a full and comprehensive solution consisting of security and political components based on the Kuwait talks. I know that Yemenis are demanding those steps, and I hope that the parties to the conflict will embrace them as soon as possible.

I met with the President of Yemen, Mr. Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi Mansour, a few days ago, and we discussed the ideas and proposals that I presented. The Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Egypt, Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates expressed their full support for my proposals, which also received backing from the Gulf Cooperation Council and the League of Arab States.

Last month — and I informed members of this following my open briefing last month (see S/PV.7999) — I received a letter from Ansar Allah and the General People's Congress in which they reaffirmed the need to build upon what was discussed in the Kuwait talks. I have invited them to meet with me in a third country in order to discuss those proposals and turn them into an agreement that includes concrete steps to avoid further bloodshed and alleviate human suffering. I hope they will commit to join those meetings as soon as possible. Every day we spend lingering without serious action towards a solution means more destruction and greater loss of life.

Yemen's path towards peace is clear, and actionable proposals are ready that will yield tangible benefits and serve to build confidence between the parties. International support for a full and comprehensive solution and for the efforts of the United Nations is unwavering. What is missing at this point is for the parties to the conflict — without any delays, excuses or procrastination — to demonstrate their determination to end the war and put the national interests above any personal gains.

Placing blame on the United Nations, the Special Envoy or the international community will not make peace. Postponement and posturing for the media do not end the war, but only serve to deepen the rift in the country. A solid foundation for peace needs to be built from within Yemeni society. A society at peace, with competent and responsive institutions, will be built only through partnership and inclusiveness and policies that respond to the demands of the people throughout the country, from north to south. Those aspirations will need to be reflected in a constitution that protects all citizens — youth, children, men and women — from all political and ideological backgrounds.

Those who want peace should find solutions, not search for pretexts. It is no secret that there are many merchants of war in Yemen who do not want peace. We will continue to work with Yemenis, including human rights groups, women's groups and civil society, to mainstream the language of peace and reach a political solution that provides safety and stability to the Yemeni people, who deserve no less.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Stephen O'Brien, as well as the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, for their informative and exhaustive briefings. I would also like to welcome and thank Mr. Abdulmalik Al-Mikhlafi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Yemen, for his presence in the Chamber.

Uruguay recognizes the intense work being done by the staff and institutions involved in humanitarian assistance activities in Yemen, which provide aid to millions of people in need and carry out that praiseworthy task in very hostile conditions.

We commend the Egyptian presidency for having convened this meeting, which lends visibility to the tragic situation in Yemen — one from which we all hope that country will soon emerge. This meeting also gives greater transparency to the work of the Security Council.

Because tomorrow marks the observance of World Humanitarian Day, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for its "Not a Target" campaign, which we support enthusiastically. We would also like to highlight today the fact that schools and hospitals are not a target. Civilians are not a target. And humanitarian workers are not a target. Humanitarian workers in every conflict know that they have our respect and admiration.

Uruguay sees no solution to the bloody conflict in Yemen other than one of a negotiation process in which all parties involved participate, that is conducted by Yemenis themselves and that leads to a political solution to the crisis. There is no military solution for this conflict, as we have said so many times.

Civilians are paying the highest price of the war with their own lives. Putting an end to the suffering caused by this man-made crisis is possible. However, that will happen only when the parties return to the negotiation table — without preconditions and in good faith — and agree to end the armed conflict.

It is time that the parties resume constructive peace talks, without any more delay. The actors have to accept that, to break the deadlock, concessions will have to be made. In that regard, Uruguay reiterates its call to resume dialogue and comply fully with the commitment to cease hostilities, as the first step towards the establishment of peace. Also, countries that have an influence on the parties should collaborate in the search for a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

The long-standing impasse in the peace process and the lack of concrete results are undermining the humanitarian situation in the country, which is exacerbated by hunger and the cholera epidemic, which is deteriorating every day. It is estimated that approximately 500,000 persons have been stricken by the illness. One person dies of cholera every hour in Yemen.

Regrettably, the widespread violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law committed by all combatants have become the common denominator in Yemen. Protecting civilians, especially the most vulnerable, has become critical and fundamental in this context of barbarism and pitiless warfare. Lamentably, women in Yemen continue to suffer deep-rooted discrimination. They do not receive adequate protection against sexual and gender violence.

They are victims of abuses and degrading treatment. This situation is exacerbated by the prolonged war, insecurity and massive internal movements, in which women are particularly vulnerable.

We encourage the Government of Yemen to establish national monitoring and reporting mechanisms to document violations of the human rights of women, including sexual violence, and ensure accountability for those responsible. Moreover, crimes committed against children have exponentially increased in this endless conflict. Children in Yemen spend their childhood in the midst of poverty, hunger, disease and indiscriminate attacks committed against them by all parties to the armed conflict. Many have been killed, mutilated or recruited.

It is critical that all perpetrators of these crimes be added to the list annexed to the annual report of the Secretary-General to be issued soon, in order to clearly denounce before the world all those countries and entities that have committed violations against children, in open contempt not only of international law but of the most elemental rules of humanity.

Those responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law should be held accountable for their crimes. Accountability is crucial to resolving the conflict and achieving lasting peace. As we did in the briefing in July (see S/PV.7999), Uruguay reiterates that the Council has the means and authority to establish impartial and transparent investigatory mechanisms for reported violations of international humanitarian law in Yemen, as committed by both parties to the dispute.

I wish to briefly refer to the presidential statement adopted 9 August (S/PRST/2017/14), which highlights the unprecedented level of global humanitarian need and the threat of famine looming over more than 20 million people in some countries, including Yemen. Conflict and violence have devastating humanitarian consequences, hamper effective humanitarian responses and are a primary cause of the famine ravaging the country.

In conclusion, I would like to call on all the parties to the conflict to agree to an immediate cessation of hostilities so as to facilitate unhindered and permanent access to humanitarian aid as well as the resumption of political negotiations.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Beforetturning to my statement, I would like to say that the Government and the people of the Plurinational State of Bolivia express their deep regret and heartfelt condolences to the Government and the people of the Kingdom of Spain for those killed and wounded as a result of the terrorist attack carried out yesterday in Barcelona. We also express our solidarity with the families of the victims, and we hope that the wounded recover soon. Even as we meet, we are receiving reports of attacks in Finland and Burkina Faso, which once again serve to highlight the responsibility of the Security Council to resolve this and other matters linked to international peace and security.

We welcome the briefings of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, and by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Stephen O'Brien, to whom we express our full support for the work that they carry out. We also welcome the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Yemen, Mr. Abdulmalik Abduljalil Ali Al-Mikhlafi.

Despite the repeated pronouncements of the Council on the situation in Yemen, it continues to deteriorate. Unfortunately, many elements are coming together in this crisis to cause it to continue to worsen in an alarming manner. A few minutes ago, Mr. O'Brien noted three such elements, namely, famine, cholera and the conflict itself. In addition to those three, we think one of the most serious of those elements is the indifference of the international community. During the meeting held on 12 July (see S/PV.7999), it was noted that the number of persons possibly infected by the cholera outbreak was already alarming. According to the World Health Organization report of 14 August, registered cases of possible infection have exceeded 500,000, of which nearly 2,000 have lost their lives. According to the same organization, since the month of April, when we were cautioned about the outbreak, the death toll has increased fivefold.

Similarly, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), this grim situation is exacerbated by limited access to water, sanitation, basic services and, above all, a lack of medicine and basic supplies for treating those affected. In additional, the diminished medical infrastructure in Yemen leaves 14.8 million people without adequate access to medical assistance. According to OCHA, the troubling food shortage places 60 per cent of the population in food insecurity and 7 million people at risk of famine.

We are distressed that, despite the Council's issuance of presidential statements of 15 June (S/PRST/2017/7) and 9 August (S/PRST/2017/14), wherein it expressed its concerns, the deployment of humanitarian aid in Yemen continues to be obstructed by haphazard unilateral measures imposed by the parties to the conflict and by the high risk and insecurity faced by humanitarian personnel, agencies and organizations on the ground.

By way of example, according to the 17 August statement of the United Nations Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen, Mr. Jamie McGoldrick, since January 11 vehicles belonging to humanitarian organizations have been hijacked in the city of Taiz, in addition to the looting of food and other humanitarian goods in that same city on three separate occasions. In addition, the constant threat of air strikes and sporadic armed clashes between the parties and with the coalition limit and obstruct the distribution of humanitarian aid required by Yemeni population.

In that regard, we once again remind the parties to the conflict that they must allow and guarantee the security and independence of agencies providing humanitarian assistance and not identify them as military objectives under any circumstance. Moreover, they should guarantee unconditional and unobstructed access to all places that require humanitarian assistance.

Reports of attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure are disturbing, as is the fact that parties to the conflict continue to consider public spaces and private homes as military objectives. On 18 July, six days after the Council received a briefing on the situation in Yemen, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported an aerial bombardment of the population of Taiz, where the target was a makeshift straw house that housed three families of internally displaced refugees — killing 18 civilians, including women and children. Following that incident, in August, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported the death of more than 10 civilians from an aerial bombardment in Saada governorate.

Moreover, the situation concerning migrants continues to be worrisome. According to a report issued by the International Organization for Migration, on 10 and 11 August 280 migrants were forced by their traffickers to abandon in the middle of the sea the boats they were using to try to reach Yemen. Only 69 of them survived. According to a report issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on 11 August, despite the conflict in the country, Yemen continues to be a destination for many refugees fleeing the Horn of Africa in search of means of subsistence, who are victims of criminal groups and human traffickers. Regrettably, the conflict and a lack of effective control mechanisms and security have made possible the proliferation of criminal groups and networks that traffic in persons by taking advantage of their poverty and desperation.

For all of those reasons, we believe that the Security Council should maintain a unanimous and infirm position in condemning efforts and military actions that exacerbate the crisis in Yemen and generate a situation of instability that threatens the lives of millions of innocent people. In that regard, we once again reiterate to the parties involved in the conflict that they have an obligation to respect the provisions of resolution 2140 (2014) and that they must commit to put in place a sustained dialogue process that makes possible a peaceful, inclusive and orderly political transition that meets the legitimate demands and aspirations of the Yemeni people, all the while respecting the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Yemen.

Lastly, we would like to express our gratitude for the work done by the various United Nations agencies and bodies to provide humanitarian assistance in such a difficult context, to which we reiterate our support.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Yemen.

Mr. Al-Mikhlafi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to convey to the members of the Security Council greetings replete with hope and peace.

I would first like to congratulate Ambassador Aboulatta on his wise stewardship of the work of the Security Council as President during this month, as well as to thank you, Sir, for giving me this opportunity to speak to the Council.

I would like to express my condolences to the victims of the horrific attacks in Spain.

I am delighted to be able to participate in this exceptional meeting to discuss the political and humanitarian situation in Yemen. I would like to stress that my participation reflects our deep conviction — that of the Yemeni Government under the leadership of His Excellency President Abdrabuh

Mansour Hadi Mansour — that the only solution to the situation in Yemen is a peaceful one.

The humanitarian and health situation in Yemen is dire and complicated. More than two years have passed since the bloody coup d'état orchestrated by Houthi militias in coalition with the previous President. We need a peaceful solution based on the three terms of reference endorsed by the international community and the Council. We are committed to durable peace. We have never called for war; instead, war was imposed upon us by that rebel gang, which is rebelling against international legitimacy. We participated in peace talks in Geneva and Biel in good faith and with high hopes of achieving peace in Yemen. Yemen was once called the happy Arab country. While the coup masters did not implement the confidence-building measures that we are agreed upon in Biel, we nevertheless participated in the talks in Kuwait, where we spent 115 days trying to achieve peace. We did so because we are a Government committed to peace that is responsible for its people, from Saada to Mahra.

However, the coup masters' participation in all those rounds of talks was only a way for them to push forward their criminal plot to destroy Yemen and to attack neighbouring countries — part of the Iranian plot to destabilize the region and gain time in order to deploy more militias and lead to more death and destruction. This is a large-scale plot that aims to destroy the national State and replace it with a sectarian State and a militia army.

Yemen has become the epitome of the so-called triangle of death of illiteracy, poverty and disease. That is precisely the sort of triangle we have been suffering from during the authoritarian rule of imams. Our people reject this rule. They reject tyranny and dictatorship. Would Europe or the civilized world today accept a divine right to rule? Of course not. Similarly, the Yemeni people reject being ruled by the coup masters, who claim a divine right to rule.

The Yemeni Government has made considerable efforts at reconstruction and has improved security and health services, with the support and assistance of our brethren in the Arab coalition under the leadership of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. However, the areas under the control of the coup masters are still suffering from repression, famine and the cholera outbreak. That is not attributed to a lack of food, which is indeed available in the markets. Instead, it is due to the fact that militias have stopped paying the salaries of civil servants for more than 10 months now, to pillaging funds from the Central Bank in Sana'a and to trading in food and humanitaran aid — all of which enables the coup authors — while millions of Yemenis are dying of hunger and curable diseases.

The Yemeni Government has always been open to the suggestions of the Special Envoy, as we believe in peace and did not choose war. However, the coup masters reject all those suggestions, thereby rendering the conflict intractable. We accepted all the suggestions in Kuwait and unilaterally signed them. But the coup masters did not accept any suggestions. Again, the conflict is intractable. And the reason is very simple: the war has become lucrative for the militias. While the Yemeni people are suffering from famine, Houthi warlords are making millions. Why would they then accept peace and lose all that money, which is tainted with Yemeni blood?

At this juncture I would like to commend the presidential statement of 9 August (S/PRST/2017/14) on the risk of famine in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and the north-east of Nigeria. The statement condemned certain parties that are failing to ensure the uninterrupted and unhindered delivery of food and humanitarian aid. For more than two and a half years, the Houthi and Saleh militias have besieged the city of Taiz and prevented the delivery of humanitarian assistance and medical supplies. They have also been shelling the city day and night.

We appreciate international appeals for the opening of the Sana'a airport. Despite our concerns and the security threat associated with the operation of the airport by the rebel militias, we are willing to agree to the opening of the airport — so long as the militias leave the airport's management to official staff affiliated with the State before the coup, under the supervision of the United Nations.

We are determined to mitigate the suffering of the people in our beloved capital of Sana'a. However, we are surprised that we hear no appeals or tugging at the human conscience in the context of the siege on the city of Taiz. The people of Taiz feel that the international community is applying double standards. Taiz is being shelled and destroyed day by day. That beautiful and peaceful city, which was once even referred to as the cultural capital and a "city of dreams", has been reduced to rubble. Its buildings, schools, hospitals,

mosques and historical landmarks have been obliterated by unrelenting, indiscriminate shelling. The shelling has not only destroyed infrastructure, but it has also led to civilian casualties, especially among women and children, who are killed daily and affected by famine and disease. The siege has exacerbated the situation. Currently exiting and returning to the city takes seven hours, whereas it previously only took 10 minutes. Since the beginning of the war, 4,164 people have died and 17,911 have been wounded in the city, most of whom were civilians, including women and children. The life for residents of the city of Taiz has become hell. It used to be a city known for its culture, education and love of the arts.

This tragedy, which is akin to some of the most horrific that the world has seen, has not received sufficient attention from humanitarian organizations and United Nations agencies. Taiz is appealing to Council members' conscience, before the law, to stand by it and lift the siege. Lifting the siege should be a priority for everyone who believes in the right to life and the right to restore peace in Yemen, including those who want to end the suffering of Yemenis. Lifting the siege in Taiz was among the top the priorities during the previous rounds of peace consultations. We have reached a number of agreements concerning the siege, under the supervision of the United Nations, the Special Envoy and the international community; but none of them has been implemented. The people of Taiz are waiting for delegations to visit the blighted city so that they can fathom the gravity of the suffering. I express my gratitude and appreciation to all those who have fulfilled, or tried to, their humanitarian obligations despite the siege.

We are committed to a peaceful and political settlement to the crisis in Yemen that will maintain the security, the independence and the territorial integrity of Yemen based on the three locally, regionally and internationally agreed-on terms of reference — the Initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council and its Implementation Mechanism, the National Dialogue Conference outcomes and the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2216 (2015). We reiterate that the Yemeni Government is willing to make concessions, however difficult, to restore just and sustainable peace, which the great Yemeni people deserve. We have therefore accepted all the proposals put forward by the Special Envoy, to which he referred today in his briefing. We reiterate that we support those proposals and that we are open to any other proposals or ideas.

But, in turn, the Security Council and the international community must send a clear, strong and decisive message to the party that rejects those proposals. It should bring pressure to bear on the coup masters so that they accept the proposals that were endorsed by the Council in its latest presidential statement and participate in negotiations in good faith and with an open mind, just as we are committed to participate in negotiations in good faith and with an open mind. In that regard, I would like to quote the preamble of the Constitution of UNESCO:

> "That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed".

I would like to clarify a number of points.

First, the Yemeni Government reiterates that it will continue to support the efforts of Special Envoy Ould Cheikh Ahmed. We support his suggestions and proposals to the President of Yemen, which include provisions for the withdrawal of militias from the port and the governorate of Hudaydah based on last year's peace consultations in Kuwait, as well as the establishment of a technical committee of economic and financial experts to help the Government establish an appropriate and urgently needed mechanism to pay civil servants' salaries and deal with revenues generated within the regions controlled by the coup masters, in order to provide the income needed to cover such expenses. Unfortunately, however, the Houthi-Saleh coalition has rejected those proposals.

Second, those gangs would have never been able to continue rejecting those proposals if they had not been receiving financial, logistical and military support from Iran. Thanks to that support and smuggled Iranian weapons, the militias are now turning into a serious threat to Yemenis and neighbouring countries, in particular the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. That country is being targeted by ballistic missiles, which poses a serious threat to navigation and international shipping routes in the Red Sea, including attacks on ships and mining in the reigon.

Third, we will continue our cooperation with the international community to combat that scourge, to which Yemen has one of the first victims. Our latest success in combating Al-Qaida and liberating the city

of Al Mukalla from that group in April 2016, with the support of Arab coalition forces, was a demonstration of our commitment to combat all terrorist and radical groups, not only militarily but also culturally and intellectually. That includes putting an end to the coup that is fuelling terrorism and usurping the role of the Government in order to plunge the country into chaos, violence, murder and destruction. They are preparing fertile ground for terrorism to flourish.

Fourth, the number of our prisoners and detainees in Houthi prisons is increasing daily. The international community has not raised its voice with regard to the violation of their human rights. Their suffering is augmented by the fact that their families and children have no knowledge of the fate of their missing loved ones — fathers, brothers and bread winners. The conscience of the international community continues to manifest itself in deafening silence.

Fifth, any attempt by a minority or sect to exclude others and alone control power and wealth in Yemen, which is exactly what the militias and coup masters are trying to achieve, will eventuallly fail. Peace will prevail through the renunciation of violence and the exclusion of others, through sharing power and wealth, and through coexistence, civil liberties and political engagement.

Sixth, leveraging human suffering is a crime. Finding serioius, genuine and comprehensive solutions and being open to all proposals and ideas are the courageous steps our people expect.

Seventh, the coup masters can achieve peace with all segments of Yemeni society if they adhere to the terms of reference for peace and what they require. They should not be rewarded for their crimes.

The militias have turned a blind eye to all the options for peace and all the concessions and sacrifices that President Mansour has made in an effort to avoid this foolish war, in which the first and last to lose are the great Yemeni people. We will remain committed to a peaceful solution based on a just and comprehensive peace according to the terms of reference. We will not tolerate blackmail or rewarding the militias for violating State sovereignty.

The Yemeni Government, under President Mansour, is making great efforts to address the dire humanitarian situation, especially with regard to the cholera epidemic and the situation in the areas under the control of the coup masters. Our responsibility extends to the whole country. We are coordinating our work with the relevant international and humanitarian organizations so as to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian and medical assistance. According to a statement by the Ministry of Health of Yemen issued on 15 August, the number of suspected cases of cholera stands at 508,680. Another 1,970 of people have died from the disease. On the other hand, those who were successfully treated account for 99 per cent of the suspected cases. That reflects the success of our common efforts and the effectiveness of treatment despite the difficult circumstances on the ground.

However, the situation remains dire and we need more assistance and support. We are deeply grateful to the donor countries and organizations that funded the 2017 Yemen humanitarian response plan, but we appeal to the international community to prioritize this issue and provide assistance. To date, we have received only 44 per cent of the funding for the humanitarian response plan, although we are already in the second half of the year. We therefore call on all States, especially those that pledged funds to Yemen at the Geneva conference, to fulfil their commitments.

I cannot fail to express the thanks and appreciation of the Government of Yemen to Secretary-General António Guterres, donor countries, the King Salman Center for Relief and Humanitarian AID, UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Food Programme, and aid organizations in neighbouring countries, including the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, for their continuous suport and assistance to address the humanitarian situation and the cholera outbreak in Yemen. We have enjoyed the generous support of the King Salman Center, in the form of 550 tons of medicines and fluids, and signed agreements with WHO and UNICEF to cover the costs of several projects to prevent the spread of cholera — worth $66.7 million, in addition to $8.2 million to fund WHO's activities related to treating cholera cases. This assistance has contributed to the success of our efforts. We in the Yemeni Government are fully committed — morally, humanly and by our Constitution — to fulfilling our obligations towards our country, our nation and our people. We are working to provide health services to all Yemenis without exception or discrimination, and we are working to overcome all difficulties that stand in our way.

In conclusion, I am confident that settling the situation in Yemen genuinely and sustainably lies in addressing the root causes of the crisis by ending the causes for war and coup against the State and by achieving national political consensus. We need to restore legitimacy and State institutions and normalize life through a peace process that saves the country from being hijacked by Tehran's militias and its affiliates in the region. We need to pressure the Houthi-Saleh to return to peace talks and engage sincerely and with genuine willingness to make concessions for the sake of Yemen. The unity of the Council will increase the chances of reaching a peaceful solution in Yemen. We need to revert to the terms of reference and the resolutions of the Security Council and respect for international law. We appreciate the efforts of the Council, the Ambassadors of the group of 18 and the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy to achieve security and stability in Yemen. We reiterate our deepest gratitude to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and all the countries of the Arab coalition for restoring legitimacy in Yemen. We are committed to peace. We ask the Council to remain at our side in order to save Yemen and its people.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on this subject.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.